



COUNTY of McHENRY

McHENRY COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
2200 NORTH SEMINARY AVENUE
WOODSTOCK, IL 60098-2637

PRESS RELEASE

May 17, 2016

Contact: Peter Austin, McHenry County Administrator

Stepping Up Initiative

At its Tuesday, May 17 Board meeting, the McHenry County Board adopted a resolution supporting 'Stepping Up', a national initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jail. The initiative is co-lead by the McHenry County Mental Health Board, McHenry County Sheriff's Office, McHenry County Department of Court Services and Probation, Twenty Second Judicial Circuit Court, McHenry County State's Attorney's Office, McHenry County Public Defender's Office, and McHenry County Administration. The County will develop and incorporate effective treatment and services for people with mental illnesses involved with the justice system.

Each year, county jails across the country detain an estimated 2 million people with serious mental illnesses. These troublesome numbers come at a cost for the criminal justice system. Individuals struggling with mental illnesses tend to remain in the jail longer and show a higher risk of recidivism. In order to alleviate this hardship and break the cycle, the Stepping Up Initiative has been developed by the National Association of Counties (NACo), the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APA Foundation). This long-term, nationwide movement aims to provide resources that will allow counties to implement practices and strategies intended to lower these numbers.

Over the past few months, McHenry County representatives have convened to analyze the current state of programming and services in place to treat these struggling individuals. A collection of programs have been identified as successful practices to be utilized through the initiative. This selection includes Mental Health First Aid, Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS-II), Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT), and Thinking for a Change (T4C), among others. In addition, data analysis is being conducted to assess the specific needs for these treatment methods and monitoring the reduction of the mental illness population in the jails following the treatment utilization. Co-leading this project will be Chief David Devane,

McHenry County Sheriff's Office Chief of Administration, and Scott Block, Executive Director of the McHenry County Mental Health Board. According to Mr. Block, "As an integrated behavioral health and justice work group, we have inventoried current programs and plan to highlight the existing McHenry County programs which complement the Stepping Up initiative. Moving forward, we will maintain increased interdepartmental communication to review local data on the prevalence of justice involved individuals with mental health and co-occurring substance abuse disorders. The increased communication will strengthen existing programs and bring forth opportunities for improvement."

Through the adoption of McHenry County's Stepping Up Resolution, the County is affirming their support for the national initiative and demonstrates a commitment to alleviating the over-representation of individuals with mental illness in our jails. Walt Pesterfield, Director of Probation and Court Services, expresses his belief that "this initiative will further cement the ongoing collaboration between many departments within McHenry County. Presently we have very good collaboration and collectively, our goal is to continually improve communication, outcomes, and success of the citizens we serve on a daily basis. All the leadership in our group is extremely committed and I am proud to be part of this team going forward." Drawing from a diverse group of leaders, McHenry County will engage our community and local government to advance a combination of efforts to alleviate this pressing concern. In line with McHenry County's mission to enhance the health, welfare and safety of its residents, the Stepping up Initiative encourages county officials, employees, and residents to join our efforts in reducing the prevalence of individuals with mental illness in jail and increasing the number of productive citizens in our community.

If you have any questions about McHenry County's Stepping Up Initiative, please contact McHenry County Administration at (815) 334-4000.